



LIFE WITH GOD: Passion

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As you read throughout the first chapters of Acts, there's a lot going on. The disciples change from being timid and confused to being bold preachers! God shows up in healings and other powerful ways. The source of all the action is the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is filling people and the changes are obvious to everyone! The Spirit is empowering the mission—as well as *passion*!

Today we use the word passion to describe intense emotion for something. This is partly right. The original use of the word, however, always included *suffering*. So, it might be better to say that passion is “intense emotion for something that you are willing to suffer for.” Worldly passion often avoids the suffering part and focuses on what feels good in the moment, ignoring the consequences of passion. However Godly passion is related to persevering for something that endures. It comes from doing life with God!

1. How would you contrast worldly passions with Godly passions?

Let's meet Stephen. READ Acts 6:2-10.

Stephen goes on to recount much of the history of Israel to these Jewish leaders. They went along with him for a time, but in Acts 7:51 he says, “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute?...” This is where they couldn't take it anymore! READ Acts 7:57-60.

2. What impresses you about Stephen?

Stephen is remembered as the first martyr of the church, killed for his faith in Jesus. It's important to note that he was not seen as an Apostle, yet he was a powerful preacher and was seen as “a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8). He may not have been among the leading Apostles, but he was no less full of the Holy Spirit. It's notable that Acts 6-7 mentions *five times* that Stephen was full of the Spirit or power of God. Stephen was doing life with God!

3. What made a person an Apostle? How did the early Apostles differ from later apostles in Acts?

Acts begins to move beyond the original Apostles and introduces some new people. The early church was growing, and they needed some help. Many would call Stephen a deacon, chosen to help take care of the church and free up the others to lead and preach. However, this didn't stop

Stephen from preaching when the opportunity arose. You might say that Stephen didn't know his "ceiling." Sometimes we are given a task or job and that becomes our identity. Stephen's identity was in Jesus and not in waiting tables. He obviously didn't see himself as *just* waiting tables! He was full of the Spirit and certainly wasn't limited by his "job description!"

4. What are ways that your current position, role, or job might contrast with your identity in Jesus? How can you live from your God given identity more?

Stephen went on to be killed by the crowds that day. Traditionally, he is viewed as the first Christian martyr. Some might see this as a loss for God, but he can use anything and turn it into good. You might say there are *no losers in the kingdom of God!* While a great persecution broke out at that time and many more Christians died, the Gospel was also spread throughout the world as Christians fled from Israel and moved to safer places. As they went they took their passion with them!

5. What are ways that you've seen God use a terrible situation and bring good out of it?

Jesus knew that the disciples would endure hardships and persecutions. He told them ahead of time, "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19-20).

Then later in this same passage he says, "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:38-39).

I don't think that Jesus is telling us to look for trouble or persecution, but it may come. This isn't a surprise. Remember our definition of passion- "intense emotion for something that you are willing to suffer for." The point that is sometimes missed is that IT'S WORTH IT.

The gospel of Jesus is worth whatever persecution or suffering may come! The way to proceed and endure is through the power of the Holy Spirit—life with God! John Mark Comer writes that "...much is said about what to believe and what is right or wrong... but so little is said about a lifestyle that is conducive to life with God" (*Practicing the Way*, 25). In other words, is your life style leading you to God or away from him? Does it stir up your passion or deflate it?

6. How passionate are you about your life with God? What might be blocking it and what could you do about that?

GOING DEEPER> READ Psalm 34. Read it again and consider our part vs. God's part—perhaps make a list. Pray that God will stir up your passion for him and his ways!